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## **The Weekend: The Friend and Foe of Independent Singles**

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# **The Weekend: The Friend and Foe of Independent Singles**

The intensification of friendship networks among independent singles is considered “the pleasure offered by the single life” (Beck, 1992, p. 121) and the sociability, rather than domesticity, of this life stage is often emphasised. This paper reports on interviews with independent singles from affluent areas which suggested that accompanying this cultural norm of sociability was the relentless onus of temporal organisation required for interpersonal synchronisation with friends. While not retracting their enjoyment of the single life, respondents expressed a distinct and distinctive sense of risk or vulnerability of spending too much time alone, particularly at the weekend. It is argued that, on the one hand, the relative absence of paid work at the weekend removes the structures that constrain the participation in and the temporal location of joint leisure practices during the week. On the other hand, the absence of employment structuring people’s day increases unpredictability about other people’s whereabouts, whenabouts, and their availability for shared practices. In response to this dilemma – that is, the weekend as the primary site for sociability met with uncertainty of others availability – independent singles responded in a number of ways to secure temporal arrangements with others, safeguarding themselves against the “built-in hazards” (Beck, 1992, p. 121) of being single and finding themselves home alone at the weekend.

Keywords: independent single, weekend, temporal organisation, leisure, friendship

## **Introduction**

Independent singles are a growing demographic in contemporary western society as, increasingly, the middle classes are deferring traditional roles and responsibilities conventionally associated with ones’ twenties and thirties: partnership and parenthood. There has been widespread fascination with the lifestyle of this “new-breed” of adults within the media, market research, and in academia (Heath & Kenyon, 2001); however,

time use research has often focused on the effects of time use of other changes in contemporary society, such as women's increased participation in the labour force and issues of work-life balance. A significant body of literature exists on the coordination of time between couples and two-parent families, particularly dual income households with children, but little is known from a temporal perspective about the daily life of the "twenty- and thirty-somethings" who are childless and single (Heath & Kenyon, 2001). It is unclear from existing research and writing what challenges and dilemmas are faced by independent singles, if any, in the synchronisation and coordination of people and practices in daily life, as distinct from other life stages. This article presents a set of findings from in-depth interviews with independent singles and identifies an experience negotiated, particularly at the weekends, which arises due to the practical constraints and cultural norms that are peculiar to this emergent demographic.

### *An Interim Life Stage*

The extent to which the life course has changed in contemporary society is debated. In short, postmodernists claim that the life course is no longer fixed, sequential, linear, and directional but de-standardised and has been replaced by individualised, chosen biographies. Transitions are considered not only to be de-standardised but precarious and reversible with, for example, individuals entering and re-entering education, employment, and the parental home at different times. This "yo-yo-isation" between disconnected episodes means that individuals, particularly young adults, must manage oscillating shifts between dependency and independence throughout their chosen biographies (Horowitz & Bromnick, 2007). On the other hand, a late modernist position holds that social norms of the timing and sequence of transitions into adulthood, although perhaps more flexible, are arguably conforming and aligned to a distinctly modern structure of the life course. Marriage is increasingly seen as an

individual choice and is becoming deinstitutionalised (Cherlin, 2004) while cohabitation has become the most common mode of first partnership. Yet for most young adults, cohabitation is part of the process of getting married; it plays a role in delaying first marriage but not substituting marriage (Ermisch, 2001). Modern cultural norms sequencing marriage, sex, then childbirth are seen to be less prescriptive and constraining than they were previously (Lewis, 2001); but, the notion that this trinity of marriage, sex, and parenthood is still clustered, albeit reordered, and are expected to occur within a relatively narrow time frame illustrates the limits within which individuals reorder transitional stages.

One particular trend in the changing life course that invites ambivalent responses is that of delaying partnership formation and parenthood into the late twenties and thirties. Such “lifestyle choices” are represented as “the product of an individualistic and hedonistic culture” (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 1999, p. 297). The contemporary single lifestyle is represented as one of “work hard and play hard” (Szmigin et al., 2008) with independent singles displaying “rising consumption aspirations for both commodities and experience” (Douglass, 2007, p. 102). Sociability, rather than domesticity, is considered a defining characteristic of this emergent life stage and the apparent focus on careers, travel, and leisure is maligned as reflecting self-centredness and diminished aspiration for independence and commitment (Furedi, 2003; Heath & Kenyon, 2001).

While some argue that young people are deferring or eschewing growing up, others have introduced an interim life stage between adolescence and full adulthood to describe and legitimate the demographic. The “emerging adulthood thesis” describes the group of twenties and thirties who are of age but have not achieved conventional adulthood transitional stages (Arnett, 2000). Young adults often leave home not for

marriage or partnership but nevertheless for what are considered socially legitimate reasons, such as going away to university. The extension of education into the late teens and very early twenties has had a ripple effect on conventional status transitions (Furstenberg, 2008). Young adults from relatively affluent backgrounds tend to marry and begin childbearing once in their late twenties or early thirties having pursued higher education, perhaps having cohabited for a period as a trial marriage (Ermisch, 2001; Furstenberg, 2008). Independent singles are therefore a distinctly middle-class demographic; the timings of transitions into partnership and parenthood are found to differ for those from less educated and less affluent families (Furstenberg, 2008). This interim stage in the middle-class life course may therefore be considered as “an interlude of choice and freedom, and an opportunity to establish their careers and have greater control over their resources before firming up on partnerships and more fully sharing lives and homes” (Chandler, Williams, Maconachie, Collett, & Dodgeon, 2004).

### ***Living arrangements and interpersonal relationships***

The deferral of partnership formation and parenthood has resulted in increased heterogeneity in the living arrangements of young adults in the UK. In addition to relationship status, living arrangements of young adults are shaped by increasing participation in higher education, rising student debt, increased labour market insecurity, and increasing house prices (Fergusson, 2002). More young adults now extend the period of dependency or semi-dependency and remain in or return to the parental home, which is motivated by the end of higher education or as a result of career or relationship break down (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Rugg, 2010). It is also increasingly common for young adults to live independently of the parental home but outside of a family, either living alone or with peers in shared households (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Living alone is a popular living arrangement among young adults,

particularly young professionals (Hall, Ogden, & Hill, 1997). Shared household living, traditionally associated with students and economically constrained single young adults, is now associated with more advantaged young people (Bynner, Ferri, & Shepherd, 1997). It has been suggested that the cultural expectation of shared-living arrangements is a development that has emerged from a tradition of shared student living (Billari & Liefbroer, 2007; Rugg, 2010). Heath and Cleaver (2003) argue that while financial concerns of young adults are not insignificant in young adults' housing decisions, many sharers view choices in terms of an on-going assessment of the material and non-material costs of different housing options, for example, the trade-off between company and privacy.

Heath (2004) argues that "as young people spend less time in couple households during their twenties and more time living alone or with their peers, friendship networks are taking on increased importance in their lives" (p. 162). For independent singles, intimacy and care take place "beyond the 'family', between partners who are not living together 'as family', and within networks of friends" (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004, p. 135). That is, in the absence of the familial relationships of partnership and parenthood, independent singles have a different set of significant others who feature prominently in their daily lives: friends, housemates, and (non-resident) romantic or sexual partners (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Listing these discrete categories of interpersonal relationships emphasises the distinctions between them yet there is often considerable overlap and blurring between relationship types: workmates and housemates become friends, friends and partners become like family, and siblings are seen as friends. Budgeon (2006) suggests that a degree of definitional ambiguity surrounds friendship as it is a relational rather than a categorical term: friendship is defined through emergent properties rather than externally imposed criteria (Adams & Allan, 1998).

Friendship is distinguished from other types of relationship in that it is, relatively speaking, voluntary rather than given (Feld & Carter, 1998; Spencer & Pahl, 2006). It is viewed as “a non-institutionalised relationship for which the norms are self-defined and fairly loose” (Bleiszner & Roberto, 2004, p. 159). Friendships are distinguished from one another and from other interpersonal relationships in terms of level interdependence, level of intimacy, and foci of activity of the relationship. Level of interdependency in relationships refers to the ways and extent to which individuals are mutually reliant on one another (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1998, p. 188), which can vary in terms of the frequency, the diversity, and the influence of interaction (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). Level of intimacy relates to the nature and extent of self-disclosure and support (Parks & Floyd, 1996). The foci of activity of the relationship refers to the practice(s) around which repeated interactions occur (such as evening classes, sports teams or clubs, and work-place interactions), although relationships often outlive the particular focus of activity in which they originate (Feld & Carter, 1998). Friendship is not a relationship unique to independent singles. Friendship does not define this demographic in the way that other relationship categories such as spouse and parent define people who are coupled with children. However, friendships change over the life-course as other interpersonal relationships progress and recede and, arguably, this voluntary relationship is the most prominent in the daily lives of independent singles (Allan, 2008, Pahl and Pevalin, 2005).

### ***Temporalities of Work, Non-work Time, and Time Wealth***

Restructuring of the economy in contemporary society entailed the de-regulation, de-standardisation, and diversification of timings of employment: increasingly people worked different days of the week and at different times of the day, de-synchronising the working patterns of sectors of society. However, Breedveld (1998) and Beers



(2000) present data indicating that most paid work is still done 9-til-5, concluding that the standard workday is not in jeopardy. Beers (2000) argues that the increased incidence of flexible work hours is largely concerned with smaller variations around the actual times workers arrive and leave the workplace.

Paid work is argued to take a higher priority and a more fixed or prominent position in the temporal organisation of the day compared with other practices (Southerton, 2006). Changes and inequalities in the allocation of time to and organisation of paid work is a keenly debated issue. It is of grave concern as to whether we are working more or working less and who is working more or less in contemporary society as this implies more or less time available for other, non-work practices. Furthermore, the temporal organisation of paid work is an important and more recent focus of analysis as work schedules significantly constrain the synchronisation and coordination of other, non-work practices in daily life (Lesnard, 2008).

Related to debates around time in paid work are discussions about the poverty of leisure time in contemporary society (Hochschild, 1997; Robinson & Godbey, 1999; Schor, 1991). Leisure is distinguished from other categories of time use as comparatively discretionary and non-obligated time; that is, leisure activities are, relatively speaking, freely chosen and are associated with a sense of enjoyment and pleasure (Pantzar & Shove, 2005). Leisure time, or free time, is typically considered to be the residual after contracted time (paid work), committed time (household labour and private engagements), and necessary time (sleeping and eating), and have been met (Ås, 1978).

Time poverty is not reducible to allocations of time. Reisch (2001) argues that a number of aspects contribute to “time wealth”: having the right amount of time (the chronometric dimension), having time available at the right time (the chronologic

dimension), having time that fits with the temporal rhythms of significant others and with institutional and infrastructural rhythms such as opening hours (the synchronisation dimension), and having control over time (personal time autonomy dimension). These dimensions of time wealth are confirmed by other studies. For example, activities carried out together by couples are argued to be more enjoyed than solitary activities and, as such, considerable effort is made to synchronise and coordinate times for shared leisure activities (Sullivan, 1996). This suggests that an individual's use of time may be constrained by the time use and availability of others since the enjoyment of leisure time is benefitted by the presence of friends or a spouses (Jenkins & Osberg, 2003). Hochschild (1997) also reported that couples orchestrated the mounting temporal demands of their individual schedules to coordinate interpersonal synchronisation and "intense periods of togetherness" (p. 276). Both of these examples are suggestive of the temporal boundary work performed by individuals to create times of shared leisure.

Daily schedules are shaped not only by the timing of paid work but by other practices that are considered to have a fixed position. Practices that have required a high degree of temporal arrangement tend to take a fixed position within the daily schedule, around which other practices are slotted in (Southerton, 2006). Southerton (2006) argued that the extent to which synchronisation was required with the personal schedules of others was shaped by a number of constraints and considerations. Practices conducted with others, particularly those that involved non-household members, required a comparatively high degree of coordination and arrangement; practices with a degree of regularity lessened the need for temporal arrangement; finally, practices conducted alone typically required no prior arrangements. The temporal organisation of people and practices within the day and the orchestration that

lies behind observable instances of time use contribute to the experience of time in daily life.

The explanandum of this research was the use, organisation, and experience of time in daily life of independent singles. It was hypothesised that independent singles would understand and organise time in unique ways given the different interpersonal relationships that were prominent in their daily life and the practical and cultural constraints associated with these interpersonal relationships. In particular, this paper presents findings on the temporal experience and organisation of shared leisure practices at the weekend.

## **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the ways in which independent singles experienced and understood the temporal organisation of people and practices in daily life. Respondents were asked to recall their previous two days of activities. As the weekend is not a self-contained period of time but interdependent and interconnected with the week, this question provided an invaluable hook into their daily lives as it naturally led to discussion of the temporal organisation of people and practices across the week, including both weekdays and weekends.

The primary means of recruitment was through personally addressed letters of invitation to two targeted postcode areas in Manchester. A multi-stage filtering process was used to identify recipients for the letter of invitation. Neighbourhood statistics and a geo-demographic tool, named ACORN, were used to identify locales and specific postcodes where the demographic and lifestyle variables matched the search for young, relatively affluent, educated respondents. The names of residents at those addresses were found using the Electoral Register. From the 300 letters sent, 28 people registered an interest in participating, and 12 people followed through to an interview. Poster

advertisements were also displayed in everyday locations in the city centre, including food outlets, hair salons, and the public library. From the nine posters displayed, five people registered an interest in participating, and two followed through to an interview. Finally, from the initial recruitment of 14 respondents using letters and posters, the names and contact details of a further 14 people were volunteered, two of which resulted in an interview. 16 interviews were conducted, with most lasting around 1 hour. Interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

[Table 1]

Table 1 provides a summary of the samples' characteristics. The sample comprised of 16 adults aged mainly between 25 and 35 years, although two respondents were outside of this age bracket (ages 43 and 60). The decision was taken to interview a small number of respondents over the age of 35 to gain some understanding of whether findings were relevant to young independent singles or independent singles in a broader sense. All respondents lived alone or in shared housing but, crucially, respondents did not live with a partner or children. Five respondents were in a relationship and had a partner who lived outside of the household. Seven respondents had previously lived with a partner and/or children and so were able to reflect upon both their previous and present experiences of temporal organisation, and identify experiences they felt were peculiar to their present circumstances. Although respondents were living the single life, a degree of heterogeneity was found in the sample as they varied in terms of occupation, seniority and career progression, employment status and working arrangements, disposable income, and friendship and social networks.

Two approaches were simultaneously carried out for the analysis of data resulting from the semi-structured interviews. First, a series of excerpts were written which aimed to summarise the data and to help identify and develop key themes and broader analytic ideas from across respondents' accounts. Second, transcripts were re-read and keywords and phrases were highlighted and extracted from the text. These words and short extracts were manually coded and sorted thematically. In this way, codes emerged from the data. Observations and codes were compared and contrasted in order to uncover similarities and differences and identify congruous and contradictory or ambivalent ideas in respondents' experiences in the temporal organisation of people and practices in daily life. This process of analysis was not sequential but iterative and progressive. Two broad themes emerged: the first concerned the way that respondents understood or made sense of time use and temporal organisation and the second described ways of achieving the synchronisation and coordination of people and practices in time.

## **Findings**

### ***Sociability***

Consistent with other studies, the majority of respondents appeared to place considerable emphasis on the sociability of their present life stage and shared leisure practices were a prominent aspect of independent singles' weekly time use. Beth (26) shared a house with three other people, with whom she had become friends, but her weekends were filled with leisure activities with friends and family living outside of the household. Whether true or not, Beth perceived her current life stage as a time for socialising and said,

People who are in their twenties and early thirties [all they] do is socialise all the time. Then when you have kids and stuff, [you do] not live your life for your kids but you have social things with your kids and [their] friends' parents and all that sort of stuff.

The association between being single and childless and sociability was seen across respondents. Richard (33) lived alone in the city centre and worked within walking distance of his flat. He emphasised the importance of an active social life as a childless and single man, living alone. He appeared to make a considerable amount of effort to meet people and maintain an active social life especially, he pointed out, as his friends had gradually *got married, moved to the suburbs*. Jane (34), a senior nurse who was temporarily lodging with a friend, considered her current life stage as a time to *work hard, play hard*. This sentiment was echoed by Ruby (26) who said, *even though it was time-out time, it was still pretty full-on. And obviously I don't do things by moderation*. Leisure, particularly shared leisure time, was often experienced and perceived as particularly intensive, which resonates with the notion that this life stage is characterised by rising consumption aspirations for experience (Douglass, 2007, p. 102).

Not all respondents presented the importance of sociability with the same strength. Olivia (26), an administrator who lived alone, viewed her present stage in life as a time for working hard and developing her career prospects, without the corresponding emphasis on leisure and sociability. She said, *I have had plenty of time in the past to relax and this is my time to work hard and do other things ... I like friends but they are unfortunately way at the bottom of the list now*. Emphasis on the importance of career is not extraordinary for this emergent demographic (Furedi, 2003). Richard, for example, equally emphasised, *I never really leave work I guess because it is my business. And it never really goes away. And I like that*. While Olivia appeared

focused on her career to the exclusion of socialising, others also referenced the consuming nature of their work but this was held in tension with the intensity of leisure.

### ***Flying Solo***

Alongside the sociability of this life stage and the emphasis on shared leisure practices, there was also a strong appreciation for being single, spending time alone, and not having the demands of others on their time. In line with the description of this interim life stage in which independent singles are considered to have greater control over their resources (Chandler, et al., 2004), respondents appeared to consider their present stage as a period within which they had greater temporal control over the resource of time. Megan (32) was a lawyer who lived alone in a flat on a gated complex. She perceived this experience of temporal autonomy to be a facet of her being single:

That's something I really like about being single: the fact that I can do that and I don't have to answer to anybody and my time is, when I've got it, mine! And I can do with it what I want.

Jane (34) had been married and was recently separated; in reflecting on her present understanding of time she said, *when you are on your own, the day is your own; so you get up at 9 or get up at 1, you are only wasting your own day... [you do] not have to consider somebody else.* Without the constraints and considerations of a co-resident partner or children, respondents felt that they experienced a greater degree of temporal autonomy, unparalleled by their peers with traditional roles and responsibilities of partnership and parenthood.

Despite the emphasis on the sociability of this life stage, expressed through shared leisure, time spent alone was often sought out and experienced positively. Karen (31), like Megan, was a lawyer. A colleague described her as *extra-curricular girl*

because she was *always seen to be doing something*. Nevertheless, she also purposefully created time alone in her personal schedule, away from the intensity of shared leisure. Talking about a Friday night she said, *I deliberately decided last night that I'd had a busy few weeks that I wasn't going to go out last night*. Instead, she stayed at home, alone. In contrast to his busy social life, Richard (33) described how Saturday morning was set apart as a designated time for being alone: *Saturday morning is sacrosanct for me. Saturday morning – paper, go and get coffee, breakfast, read the paper and just relax, you know. That's my favourite part of the week – Saturday morning*. He had established a routine, creating a period of time by himself and for himself. Time alone was intentional and created as a retreat from the buzz surrounding time spent with others.

Spending time alone was often spoken about positively and was at times justified by referring a state of independence and not feeling the need to be surrounded by people. Beth (26) placed a particularly strong emphasis on the sociability but created times when she could be alone saying, *sometimes I'm sick of spending time with people just for the sake of it so it is nice to have a whole weekend on your own and do what you want*. Like Beth, Megan (32) also positioned herself as someone who did not need to surround herself with other people saying, *I am quite comfortable in my own company. I'm a really sociable person but, at the same time, I don't need to be around people the whole time*. On the other hand, there were those who, despite creating time to be alone, showed a preference for being with others and positioned themselves as *not good at staying in* (Richard).

Time alone was not only created to counterbalance the intensity of social life but also simply to create a temporal space away from the gaze of others. Both Becky (29) and Harriet (24), who both lived in flats in an out of town area, spoke about travelling to



work in the mornings and preferring the seemingly more inconvenient or time consuming option in order to create time for themselves. Becky said, *Sometimes I will even drive half way and walk half way just so I can get some of the time to myself and I don't have to sit next to anyone on the bus...I have my iPod, I listen to music.* Harriet on the other hand said, *I get the bus and then in the evening I get a lift home. I could get a lift there and back but I quite like the walk in the morning.* These periods of time were purposefully orchestrated in order that the respondents could be by themselves. It was seen across respondents that solitary activity was associated with the experience of autonomy and temporal control and there was a positive affect toward time spent alone when this time was intentional and anticipated by respondents.

### ***The Distinctiveness of the Weekend***

The cultural valuing of sociability and the emphasis on coordinating shared leisure varied by day of the week. From Monday to Friday, paid work absorbed much of the respondents' day. With the exception of the four respondents who were in full-time education (Becky, Lillian, Robert, and Ruby), respondents were occupied with paid work anywhere between 7 and 10 hours per day, between the hours of 7am and 7pm. Due to the duration and the timings of paid work, employment constrained the amount of time available for and the temporal location of leisure on weekdays, confining it mainly to the evening. Karen (31) was among those whose work tended to extend later into the evenings on weekdays; in describing her previous two days she said, *Thursday I got in at about 8 o'clock. Came home, had some dinner. That was about it really. Yesterday was pretty much the same; got in a little bit later.* Where respondents worked later into the evening this had repercussions for the timing of eating which was pushed even later into the evening, further restricting the window of

opportunity for leisure practices on weeknights. The limited time frame on weekday evenings constrained the range of possible leisure practices to activities of a relatively short duration, requiring minimal travel time, and to practices which did not affect the respondent's ability to work the following day. Respondents reported the occasional low-key shared leisure practice with friends on weeknights, including meeting for a cup of tea or coffee or a quiet drink (9 respondents) or an informal meal (6 respondents). However, partly due to the temporal demands of employment during the week, there was less emphasis on getting together with others on weeknights and it was common to carry out leisure practices alone (e.g. going to the gym, reading, watching TV or a DVD, going on the internet or computer, and playing music) and to attend organised leisure activities with institutionally fixed timings (e.g. team sports, dancing, fitness classes, knitting club, choir, band practise, volunteering with the Girl Guiding movement and asylum seekers, and adult education evening classes). Duncan (43) in summary said, *I don't tend to do too much in the week; it tends to be at the weekend*. Karen (31) went a step further and, in addition to suggesting that she was unable to make social arrangements on weekdays, expected others were also unable to commit to plans: *I don't know what time I am going to be leaving work... You just assume that other people are busy, like you are, during the week*. While weekdays were not void of leisure activities or coordinated shared leisure, weekdays were not characterised by leisure in the same way as the weekend.

Weekends were designated as the primary site for socialising and shared leisure practices. A number of respondents conferred a special status on the weekend. Karen (31) made a clear evaluative distinction between weekdays and the weekend saying, *I treasure my weekends*. Beth (26) also placed a high emphasis on weekends being fun-filled and expressed frustration when weekend plans were not as enjoyable as

anticipated because, *in my eyes, that's a currency. That weekend was a time to spend and I didn't feel like I spent it wisely.* Jane (34) berated her new boyfriend for previously using weekends *for food shopping, DIY, and cleaning* and proposed that *weekends are for forgetting your working week, relaxing after your working week, and making memories.* Time at the weekend was valuable: it is something to be treasured and used well, for the experiential and not for the practical. Free time on weeknights was not spoken about in the same way and was not bestowed the same special status. The cultural valuing of sociability and the emphasis on coordinating shared leisure not only varied by day of the week but also by time of day. The importance of interpersonal synchronisation for shared leisure was experienced more intensely on Friday and Saturday evenings. In describing the challenge of organising a large dinner party with a group of friends, Karen (31) said, *if you were to do a Sunday afternoon or a Friday night then that is a bit easier but Saturday night is very difficult because people are away for the weekend or that is when people decide to do things.* Lloyd (34) worked part-time as a barrister alongside ski instructing and language translation; he described how he, *didn't do much on the Sunday but I had had heavy nights on Friday and to some extent Saturday.* Across respondents, going out and drinking alcohol was a prominent shared leisure practice, primarily confined to the weekend, and particularly Friday and Saturday nights. While respondents tended to report that they, *don't like getting drunk in the week* (Beth, 26), 12 of the 16 respondents spoke about going out and drinking in the evening at the weekend. Megan (32) described how, *when I go out on Saturday night I don't think, 'I have to be back by x'. That's my release from the working week. Sometimes I don't get back until 6 in the morning.* In this way, Friday and Saturday nights were the site for “calculated hedonism”, “planned letting go” (Szmigin, et al., 2008, p. 361), or “controlled de-control” (Featherstone, 1991, p. 81).

In contrast to the cultural expectation for sociability and shared leisure on Friday and Saturday evenings, it was seen as acceptable to spend time alone on Saturday and Sunday mornings. In spite of different living arrangements, respondents often reported spending Saturday and Sunday mornings alone, sleeping in, and relaxing. Robert (23) was an undergraduate student who had recently finished his studies; he said, *Saturday I got up at 11. I read in bed 'til about half 12 because I had no plans for the early daytime.* Becky (29) was a PhD student who also worked as a research assistant and she too said, *Yeah, 11. I always get up late on Saturday.* Naomi (26) was a researcher for an independent television company and she described how on, *Saturday, I got up mid-morning and I went running on my own on Saturday.* Finally Megan (32) planned to use her Saturday morning to do chores, which were also carried out alone:

I'm going to put some washing on; whilst the washing is on I am going to go to the supermarket because I won't be able to go tomorrow. By the time I come back, hopefully that will be ready; I will hang that up to dry. Put some stuff in the fridge. Get myself ready because a friend is coming round to pick me up.

Time alone on Saturday and Sunday morning created a counterbalance the intensity of shared leisure which tended to be concentrated on Friday and Saturday evenings and, to a lesser extent, during the afternoons on Saturday and Sunday.

### ***Left Sitting on Your Own***

It has been argued that the absence of paid work at the weekend removed the structures that constrained the participation in and the temporal location of joint leisure practices. Most importantly for the present discussion, the availability of friends for shared leisure was also more likely at the weekend as they too were less likely to be occupied by the temporal demands associated with employment. However, the challenge presents itself

that in the absence of temporal structures of employment, the whereabouts, whenabouts, and availability of friends for shared leisure practices becomes somewhat unpredictable. This uncertainty and unpredictability of friends availability appeared particularly poignant for independent singles due to the relative level of interdependency (or, rather, independency) of their significant others and the practical constraints of living in separate households from friends.

Herein lies the dilemma for independent singles: the weekend is the primary site for sociability but it is met with the uncertainty about others' availability and the challenge of temporal coordination. In the face of this dilemma, a number of respondents expressed a distinct sense of risk of spending too much time alone and spending time alone during periods associated with sociability and joint leisure practices. Megan (32) recounted a conversation with another single friend where they agreed with one another that,

When you are single, because you are single, you don't have anyone to say to, 'Shall we just stay in tonight and have curry?' So you have to do quite a lot of pre-planning yourself. You have got to make sure that you are not left sitting on your own.

Beth (26) reinforced Megan's assertion that couples enjoy a degree of security and protection from the anxiety of finding themselves alone (albeit that Beth did not speak of this security too highly); when contrasting her present experience of living with friends and her past experience of living with a boyfriend she said, *there was so much dead time because you just sit around...I don't know why, I just wouldn't plan as much stuff to do because we were together*. The crux of this anxious experience was spending time alone unintentionally, not by choice. Beth (26) said, *I like having free weekends to do nothing. But I like to have planned to do nothing...If I've got a weekend coming up and I've not planned to do anything and I've not planned to do nothing, then I just*

*think, I need to plan to do something!* By contrast time alone that was chosen was experienced positively, as noted earlier. This experience of vulnerability of finding yourself alone and without social plans appeared particularly pronounced for those who lived alone, as they did not have the opportunity to have impromptu and impulsive socialising with housemates. It was also particularly felt by those who were not dating, as this interpersonal relationship tended to be associated with an increased level of interdependency.

### **Responses to the Dilemma**

Combating the risk of being found left sitting on your own at the weekend demanded temporal organisation to create interpersonal synchronisation with friends that often lived in separate households. Across respondents' accounts, there were two prevalent responses to the dilemma of the pressure for sociability but uncertainty about others availability. First, a number of respondents tended to have a flexible and present oriented approach to the organisation of time at the weekends. A present orientation describes a tendency to have a greater interest and concern for what was going on more immediately, being spontaneous and impromptu in organising and carrying out practices, and responding to feelings at that moment in time. Silverstone (1993) describes present orientation as an occupation with "the here and now, with what is being experienced or actually felt or being undertaken" ( p. 295). With a present approach to temporal arrangements, temporal boundaries were not inscribed into the future and time slots were not designated for particular people or practices but temporal boundaries were drawn around practices as they unfolded in time. Furthermore, a flexible disposition describes the tendency to adapt temporal arrangements to people and practices and the experience of being at ease with changing temporal arrangements. It was also characterised by the experience of having control over the temporal

boundaries around practices. These dispositions toward the organisation of shared leisure practices enabled respondents to change temporal arrangements depending on the options presently in front of them. At times, Karen (31) took this approach to spending time with friends at the weekend: she said, *I have quite full weekends which aren't by design...it just sort of happens...the weekends just seem to fill up. People will contact you about doing stuff.* Megan (32) too had a more spontaneous weekend ahead of her and said, *I would consider it quite an ad hoc weekend. Just last minute stuff to do. I think it is has been governed by the weather; BBQ, picnic.* This account illustrates that, under a flexible and present oriented approach, temporal arrangements with others was shaped by the contemporaneous opportunities that arose. Robert (23) gave perhaps the most caricatured example of sharing leisure time with friends by contemporaneously making arrangements:

Saturday I got up at 11. I read in bed 'til about half 12 because I had no plans...Get up. Had food...After that, one of my friends from university, who did the same course as me, he invited us to go to the park...So we went and did that until half 6 or 7 in the evening. Then went to his house where the rest of his housemates were. Watched a film. A film that I had bought that I had been telling them about all day...I think after that I came back home, to the flat and my housemate and his girlfriend were listening to music. Took a few drinks. Was maybe in bed by about 12 o'clock.

This present and flexible approach to temporal organisation is synonymous with event time in which there are no externally imposed deadlines and boundaries since the end of one activity naturally becomes the beginning of the next (Levine, 2005).

On the other hand, there were respondents who tended take a fixed and future oriented approach to deal with the dilemma. A fixed disposition describes a preference

for a more structured, ordered, and decided organisation of people and practices and having temporal arrangements settled. It was characterised by a preference for firm and solid, rather than fluid, temporal arrangements. A preference for fixed temporal arrangements was associated with the fortification of temporal boundaries around different groups of people or types of practices to create differentiation in time and to compartmentalise people and practices. Moreover, a future orientation describes a tendency to be concerned with considering possibilities and future uses of time, making arrangements with a degree of advance. An orientation toward the future 'is emphasized in anticipation, imagining or planning ahead: to deferred gratification' (Silverstone, 1993, p. 295). Both Beth (26) and Megan (32) presented particularly acute examples of this. Beth said, *[I] am always making sure that my weekends in the next 2 months are like...I know now in my head what weekend I'm doing stuff until August.* Similarly Megan said, *I have got stuff happening every weekend for about 2 months.* This approach dealt with the uncertainty of the whereabouts and whenabouts of people and practices in the daily schedule and was used to create predictability in temporal arrangements. Fixed and future orientations to shared leisure at the weekends was about securing the availability of someone in advance and consequently created unavailability to other people or practices.

## **Conclusion**

The presented findings have provided a glimpse into some of the understandings and experiences of time and temporal organisation in daily life by the emergent demographic of independent singles. The conceptualisation of leisure as a residual did not appear to meaningfully capture the importance and prominence given to this



category of practices for independent singles, given the centrality of friendship and emphasis on sociability in their daily lives. Weekends were filled with shared leisure whether spontaneously or with considerable advance. The claim that busyness has become a “badge of honour” (Gershuny, 2005) and being busy is symbolic of a “full” and “valued” life (Darier, 1998) appears particularly relevant to independent singles’ leisure time at the weekend.

In general, respondents had more opportunity to spend time with friends in shared leisure practices at the weekend compared with weekdays. The organisation of time at the weekend was typically more discretionary than weekdays and, comparatively, a product of personal organisation. Using Reisch’s (2001) concept of time wealth to reframe these observations it can be said that the amount of free time was likely to be greatest at the weekend (chronometric dimension), respondents’ free time was likely to be synchronous with friends’ (chronologic and synchronisation dimensions), and there was increased control over temporal arrangements in the absence of the structures of paid work (personal temporal autonomy dimension). It was perhaps for this reason that the weekend was perceived to have greater value than free time on weekday evening and a special status was bestowed upon the weekend.

The time-varying cultural norm of sociability, both across the week and across the day, leads to time-varying pressures to coordinate shared leisure with others. On the one hand, time alone at the weekend was experienced positively where this time was intentional; time alone that was chosen was characterised by a sense of increased temporal autonomy and was experienced as a retreat from the intensity of shared leisure. However, time spent alone that was not a deliberate choice or the potential of finding yourself in this position evoked a sense of risk or vulnerability, particularly at times of the day conventionally associated with shared leisure. This risk of being left

sitting on your own is one of the hazards of the single life, an experience that presented itself with each weekend (Beck, 1992, p. 121). This experience appears to be unique to this demographic and it stands in stark contrast with the well-documented experience of couples with children. Existing research suggests that pure, uninterrupted leisure time decreases in parenthood (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000) and mothers in particular find it challenging to find and protect “me time” (Stevens, Maclaran, & Brown, 2003) or “downtime” (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981, p. 52). In this way, time spent alone by parents with children is reported as an indulgence, without mention of an experience of risk or vulnerability of being alone.

While friendship is considered an indispensable safeguard against the built in hazards of being single, friendship itself implies the increased challenge of temporal coordination of personal schedules. Practices that involve non-household members require a relatively high degree of arrangement, compared with the synchronisation of personal schedules within a household, as the social and spatial proximity demands a greater degree of coordination between actors (Southerton, 2006). As independent singles’ most significant interpersonal relationships are often with those living in separate households, the practical constraints of orchestrating shared leisure across households presents a challenge that is arguably unparalleled by their peers with partners and children. This suggests that the experience and organisation of time is shaped by practical and cultural constraints implied by the personal relationships most prominent in individuals’ lives.

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Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation (employment basis)	Highest Qualification	Relationship	Living Arrangements (# of others in household)	History
Becky	29	F	PhD student; Research assistant (PT)	Masters	N	Rented flat, lived alone	-
Beth	26	F	Administrator (Flexi FT)	Bachelors	N	Rented house, shared (3)	Previously cohabited
Duncan	43	M	IT Senior Manager (Flexi FT)	-	Y	Rented flat, lived alone	Divorced, non-resident child
Harriet	24	F	Administrator (Flexi FT)	Masters	Y	Rented flat, shared (1)	-
Jane	34	F	Senior nurse (FT, site & homeworking)	Professional	Y	Temporarily lodging, shared (1)	Separated, had step-children
Karen	31	F	Lawyer (FT)	Professional	N	Owned flat, lived alone	-
Lillian	60	F	PhD student; Retired	-	Y	Rented flat, lived alone	Lived apart from husband
Lloyd	34	M	Barrister (PT); Ski instructor (Casual); Language translator (Casual)	Professional	N	Owned house, lived alone	Previously cohabited
Megan	32	F	Lawyer (FT)	Professional	N	Owned flat, lived alone	-
Naomi	26	F	TV programme researcher (PT)	Masters	N	Rented flat, shared (1)	-
Olivia	26	F	Administrator (Flexi FT); Waitress (PT); Undergraduate Student (OU)	A level	N	Council house, lived alone	Separated
Patrick	27	M	Machinery Technician (FT Flexi)	GCSE	Y	Rented flat, lived alone	-
Richard	33	M	Public Relations Manager (FT, self-employed)	Bachelors	N	Rented flat, lived alone	Divorced
Robert	23	M	Undergraduate student	A level	N	Parent's owned flat, shared (1)	-
Ruby	26	F	Masters student; Waitress (PT)	Bachelors	N	Rented house, shared (4)	-
Sarah	24	F	Security officer (Casual); Masters student	Bachelors	N	Rented flat, shared (1)	-

